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**Language Contact in the Republic of Macedonia: A Balkan Model of Mutual Multilingualism**

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**Research Abstract**

The research conducted was part of a larger project that has the goals of creating new knowledge in Balkan linguistics, of contributing to interdisciplinary conversations on language contact and identity issues in the humanities and social sciences by filling a gap in the existing literature, and of bringing the results to speakers of the languages as well as to academic and policy communities. The main product will be a book on language and identity in the Balkans, with a focus on Macedonia as macrocosm, Skopje as microcosm, and the towns of the western periphery as mesocosm linking the two. The field work for this project was based on my previous research with the crucial addition of the significance of peripheral towns in the linguistic shaping of the metropole. For this purpose, I engaged in participant observation field work in the towns of Tetovo, Gostivar, Debar, Struga, and Ohrid, as well as Kumanovo and Kichevo. Taken together with Skopje, these towns represent the on-going multilingual complexities of Macedonia. The research confirmed both the importance of multilingualism in on-going processes of language change and the vitality of the Balkan Sprachbund in the Republic of Macedonia.

**Research Goals**

The research I undertook — a sociolinguistic investigation of the towns on the western periphery of Macedonia—was for an interdisciplinary monograph on language and identity in the Balkans. The abundant literature on Balkan linguistics, on the one hand, and the social science literature on language in its relationship to nationalism, identity, and power, on the other, have intersected with remarkable rarity. This is especially noteworthy in light of the upheavals of the 1990s. Building on the post-World War One use of Balkanize to mean ‘break up into tiny units,’

Todorova (1997) has made Balkanism a variant of Said's Orientalism, while at the same time obscuring the original meaning of Balkanism introduced by Seliščev (1925) as a feature shared among the Balkan languages owing to convergence resulting from centuries of multilingualism. Thus, in linguistics, Balkanisms are evidence of shared communicative practices that have resulted from multilingual social contact in a context of coexistence and distinctive identity maintenance. Anthropologically informed work such as Irvine and Gal (2000) has used the example of Standard Macedonian in elucidating the workings of language ideology in the creation of disciplinary as well as linguistic boundaries. But Macedonia is also home to representative dialects of every language in the Balkan linguistic league. Missing from academic literature is a broader, synthetically focused, interdisciplinary approach that can integrate the insights of linguistics with those of history, anthropology, and other social sciences for the Balkans in general and Macedonia in particular. The proposed book will help to fill this gap. At the same time, the work will be of use to policy-makers by enabling them to have a more informed grasp of both the linguistic complexities of the region and the potential for linguistically informed policies to diffuse ethnic and religious tensions.

The book will take an interdisciplinary theoretical understanding of language and identity as its frame and look at the Balkans in three nesting sections. The first will be an overview of the general historical background of the Balkans from a linguistic point of view. Second will be a survey of the rise of the Balkan standard languages (including on-going efforts for Aromanian and Romani). Third will be a detailed case-study of language contact in Macedonia, where standards and dialects from all of the Balkan linguistic groups (Slavic, Romance, Albanian, Turkic, Romani, Greek) are in competition and contact.

The third section, for which this research project was undertaken, involved collecting data from multilingual speakers via participant observation in the towns of Macedonia's western periphery. The project developed out of research I conducted in Skopje in 2008-2009 with support from Fulbright-Hays and Guggenheim grants. As I argued then, Skopje is a microcosm of Macedonia, which in turn is a microcosm of the Balkans. I discovered during the course of my research, however, that Macedonia as macrocosm vis-à-vis Skopje's microcosm has a vital mesocosm: the towns of the western periphery. The continued, multi-layered process of

linguistic interaction between the capital and these smaller centers is crucial to explaining current linguistic processes, and it is the situations in these towns that I investigated.

### **Research Activities**

The methodology for the project was that of participant observation as practiced in anthropological linguistic fieldwork. The types of data needed for this project are best produced in conversation, and certain themes were introduced as appropriate. Grammatical and code switching data was found throughout the recorded conversations. Although I have familiarity with all the Balkan languages, my primary contact languages for this project were Macedonian and Albanian, although I also used Turkish and Romani. During the course of the fellowship I made research trips to Tetovo, Gostivar, Debar, Struga, Ohrid, Kumanovo, and Kichevo. I also worked with a particularly important ethnically mixed group of young people from Ohrid (Macedonian, Torbesh, and Aromanian) who move regularly between Ohrid and Skopje. I also found that conversations in Skopje about the towns of the western periphery, especially with people whose origins are in those towns, were very useful. In general, my research activities involved participant observation, open-ended conversations, and structured interviews. Research was conducted in university classrooms and offices, coffee shops and cafes, private homes, shops and market places, and while traveling from one place to another by car or bus. The towns of Macedonia's western periphery (in both the dialectological and geographic senses) are Tetovo, Gostivar, Debar, Struga, and Ohrid, going from north to south. Strictly speaking, Resen is in the Ohrid-Struga dialect zone for Macedonian, but the town's orientation is more to nearby west-central Bitola than to Skopje, and so it was not included. In the course of my research, it became clear to me that I would need to visit Kichevo as well. Kichevo is the westernmost large town in the west-central dialect zone for Macedonian, but in terms of multilingualism, the sociolinguistic situation is like that in the towns of the western periphery rather than the other towns in the west-central zone. While Kumanovo is about 30 km northeast of Skopje, it nonetheless represents a similar multilingual situation to the towns of the western periphery and so it was included.

In addition to conducting field work, I met and discussed my project with Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, and Romani scholars in Macedonia, especially those engaged in dialectological research. These discussions helped me to focus my own research and also resulted in plans for new, collaborative projects.

A part of my time in the field was spent on the first stages of transcribing and analyzing my sound recordings. This is on-going work, continuing past the time of the funded project, since the main goal of the project was to collect the materials as discussed above.

An ancillary project that turned up by chance was an archival discovery. My colleague Keith Brown, of Brown University, was in Macedonia on a Fulbright researching the history of Macedonian democratization movements in the 1980s (a complex and original research topic itself) while I was there, and he happened to discover in the MANU archives two files from the Lazar Kolishevski papers that consisted entirely of clippings from the linguistic advice columns that were a standard feature of “Nova Makedonija” (the principle Macedonian daily newspaper 1944-1991). Lazar Kolishevski was the most powerful Macedonian politician of former Yugoslavia, and is today a controversial historical figure. He is from the generation that pre-dates the use of Macedonian in education, and his native dialect was from eastern Macedonian (the western dialects were the basis of the standard). Prof. Brown was looking for very different kinds of documents, but he informed me of his discovery thinking it might be interesting, which indeed it is. Kolishevski was selective in the clippings he kept, and he marked those that he considered particularly important. Given his lack of involvement in language standardization and the linguistic politics of the period (a topic I have researched and published on; Friedman 1993), this archive gives the linguist interested in the process of the standardization of Macedonian and its implementation a window into the attitudes of a powerful non-linguist concerned with making the right linguistic impression. This in turn is a window into sociolinguistic attitudes among the Macedonian elite in pre-independence Macedonia. I have scanned all the clippings (and provided the MANU archive with a disk of the scans), and they will form the basis of a research project on Macedonian standardization that is related to my larger project of the sociolinguistics of the Republic of Macedonia.

### **Important Research Findings**

Since this was mostly a data gathering phase for a larger project, it is too early to report in detail on all the results, but among the most striking things I encountered was the selection of specific dialect features in Macedonian towns as emblematic, while others are abandoned in favor of features characteristic of the standard. Thus for example, Ohrid speakers of all ethnicities preserve the archaic third singular present tense marker <-t> (standard <-Ø>) as well as the

characteristic derived imperfective marker <-va-> (standard <-uva->) when speaking Macedonian, but only the older generation of Macedonians still use [shch] as the reflex of original \**tj*, while all younger speakers have the standard's reflex [kj], a type of pronunciation that moved south from Serbia into most of Macedonia in the late medieval period. It would appear that after several centuries of stability, new sociopolitical circumstances are encouraging its renewed spread as a Macedonian feature. It is particularly noteworthy that during the decades of the second Yugoslavia, while Serbo-Croatian was the national language and had high prestige in Macedonia, this pronunciation did not replace the older reflex despite the fact that it is closer to Serbo-Croatian. The old [shch] reflex is now generationally emblematic. In general in Macedonia, while dialectal processes are active at all levels, it appears that morphology is particularly subject to indexicality in the west, as is prosody in the eastern part of the country. The reasons for this division of labor are complex and connected to other areas of phonology, morphology, and social prestige.

In the way that Skopje is the melting pot of Macedonian dialects, so Tetovo is for northeastern, east-central (both Geg), and southern (Tosk) Albanian. With two Albanian-language universities in Tetovo, one a major international project and the other a state school that has made remarkable strides in the past decade, Tetovo is now a magnet not only for Albanian-speakers from all over Macedonia, but also from Kosovo and the Preshevo-Medvedje-Bujanovac region of Serbia. Speakers from Albania with family connections across the border also sometimes opt for education in Tetovo. Turkish speakers in Macedonia often opt for one of these universities, as do some Macedonian and Romani speakers. The emerging koine for this younger generation shows a number of interesting features of leveling as well as calquing on Macedonian. Of particular interest here are pragmatic devices such as topicalization and focus, which are signaled both by word order and the deployment of reduplicative clitic pronouns. Complexities of the substantival and adjectival plural marking system are being leveled out, and definiteness marking and subordinate clause marking are moving in directions that bring them closer to Macedonian.

For Romani, the situation is not unlike that of Athens in the mid to late nineteenth century, when large numbers of people from the Peloponnesus moved to the then-new capital of the then-new country and overwhelmed the old Athens town dialect. The migration of village to

city has affected Romani just as it has many other languages. Despite the stereotype of Romani speakers as either transient or urban, in fact large numbers of Romani speakers — as with all other linguistic groups in Macedonia — were settled and lived in villages prior to World War Two. Some of the more conservative features of the village dialects (e.g., preservation of intervocalic <s> in certain person markers and case markers), with support from other conservative dialects, are eliminating old innovations of the town dialects. Innovations in evidential strategies also seem to be occurring, with the use of interrogative markers to signal dubitativity in declarative sentences. Parallel developments have occurred in parts of Bulgaria, and here the impetus appears to be Macedonian, whose evidential system is very similar to (albeit not identical with) that of Bulgarian.

In Gostivar, Turkish continues to be the home language of the town population with urban origins, but the large influx of Albanian speakers from the nearby villages has significantly changed the linguistic dynamics. While many of these people have some knowledge of Turkish, especially middle-aged speakers, many Turkish speakers are choosing to send their children to Albanian language schools. The reasons given are that at the pre-tertiary level, the Albanian language schools are reputed to be better. Moreover, for post-secondary education, Albanian is the main language of instruction at Southeast European University and the University of Tetovo, both of which have good reputations. Nonetheless, Turkish retains its vitality as a home language, and a distinctive sub-dialect of Albanian as spoken by people with Turkish as their home language (characterized by different stress patterns, reduction in gender agreement, etc.) likewise retains its vitality.

Debar is unique among Macedonian towns in that it has a very long tradition of Albanian-Macedonian bilingualism, as seen in convergent developments such as the denasalization of the Common Slavic and Common Albanian low back nasal vowels to a mid-back open /o/. Debar Albanian is also unique among Geg dialects in having completely lost nasalization (with almost complete denasalization of nasal vowels in the orthodox Geg speaking villages between Debar and Gostivar, the low back nasal *â* being the only survival). This loss is an independent development from Tosk denasalization, although both phenomena may ultimately be connected with Slavic (in the case of Debar Geg, the evidence is very strong, while in the case of Tosk it is more conjectural.) Debar (together with one nearby village) is also

unique in being the only Albanian dialect that has generalized the second singular present subjunctive marker *-sh* to the second singular present indicative (which in other Albanian dialects is identical to the third singular indicative). This generalization is undoubtedly connected to the use of this same marker (*-sh*) in the second singular present tense in Macedonian, which does not have a morphologically distinct subjunctive. The respective markers in Albanian and Macedonian are ultimately part of their common Indo-European heritage, although their specific convergent realizations are the result of parallel development. It is the deployment of the respective markers that is contact-related. Debar remains a bilingual Macedonian-Albanian town with something of a generation gap. The oldest generation remains bilingual, the middle generation of Macedonians are less likely to know Albanian, while the younger generation of Macedonians are also fluent in Debar Albanian. Albanian speakers of the younger generation, however, do not appear to be as fluent in Macedonian as the older generations. The reasons for these differences are probably connected to different phases in the socio-political situation in Macedonia. It is also worth noting that Debar is unique in that Albanian and Macedonian but not Turkish are the languages of old urban families. Turkish here is associated with the villages. This has in turn impacted the success of recruiters for Turkish language schools among Macedonian speaking Muslim villagers in this region.

Although Kichevo represents a west-central rather than peripheral Macedonian dialect, its location at the extreme west of that zone, i.e. a few kilometers from where the peripheral dialects begin, combined with the sociolinguistics of its multilingual situation, turned out to be relevant for this project, and so it was included. The surrounding villages are mostly either Albanian or Macedonian Muslim (although there are a few Macedonian Christian villages). In the town itself, Macedonian is the dominant home language among both Christians and Muslims of the older urban generation, but there is a shift to Albanian among some Muslims. The widespread urban multilingualism, however, is reminiscent of Debar.

In terms of linguistic landscapes, it is worth noting that while in Gostivar all kinds of businesses display trilingual (Albanian, Macedonian, Turkish) signs, in Tetovo only pharmacies and jewelers have trilingual signs, while other businesses have at most Albanian and Macedonian. In Debar, Kichevo, and Struga, signage is at most bilingual (Albanian,

Macedonian). By contrast, Skopje also has Romani signage in addition to Albanian, Turkish, and Macedonian, depending on the neighborhood.

It is also worth noting that certain regionally specific dialect features appear to be expanding or contracting, and contact of various sorts is arguably playing a role. Thus, for example, the typical east central Geg lowering and diphthongization of stressed high vowels (/i/ and /u/), which is quite emblematic, is in retreat. Although dialect atlases show it extending as far north as Tetovo, in fact it is encountered with frequency only south of Gostivar. This could be part of the influence of the standard and of the Northeastern Geg of Kosovo and the villages across the border in northern Macedonia, which in this respect have the same reflexes as the Albanian standard. At the same time, however, Macedonian not only lacks such diphthongs but will have /i/ and /u/ in the same environments as standard Albanian, thus reinforcing both the local emblematicity and regional retreat of this feature. In the Macedonian dialects of the western periphery, the use of the preposition *na* which marks indirect objects and motion to or location on or at as well as possession (in the east), has expanded to mark direct objects as well. The spread of this phenomenon has been noted before (Koneski 1986, Topolinjska Forthcoming) and suggestions have been made that it is a typological rather than areal phenomenon (Adamou 2009 versus Koneski 1967). What is lacking, however, is an account of its function as emblematic where it is used. This together with differential (definite) direct object marking in Albanian (and Turkish and Aromanian) points to language contact as contributing to the spread of the feature.

*Photos:* Please see the attached zip file and list of explanations. The photos are in three categories: 1) Linguistic Landscape (signs); 2) Places; 3) People. This first category is particularly important for the study of multilingualism, since it illustrates the day-to-day visual environment in which multilingualism is enacted.

### **Policy Implications and Recommendations**

Although STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) research is of obvious importance, it is the social sciences and humanities that have the greatest impact on political life in the Republic of Macedonia (and elsewhere). A specific problem in Macedonia is when non-linguists attempt to engage in unscientific historical linguistics. MANU even went so far as to publish a pseudo-scientific study by a mathematician and an engineer “proving” that the middle

section of the Rosetta Stone (which is in Demotic Egyptian) was in Ancient Macedonian, which, to make matters worse, they identify as Modern Macedonian. MANU did this in its Mathematics and Engineering section, over the objections of the linguists. Ilievski (2008), also published by MANU, but in the Linguistics section, is a reasoned rebuttal of both these unscientific fantasies and the more serious Greek attempts to align Ancient Macedonian with Ancient Greek. These latter debates are more complex and the details need not concern us here. At issue is the Macedonian government's policy of "antiquization", which is basically a response to the international community's capitulation to Greek attempts to destabilize and delegitimize the Macedonian state. The policy of antiquization has become ever more aggressive since Greece was allowed to block Macedonia's membership in NATO in 2008. Again, the details are beyond the purview of this report, but the U.S. should be informed and cautious in its policies of supporting academic decentralization in Macedonia. The center may have its problems, but these can become magnified in the periphery. In formulating policies for Macedonia in the State Department, due consideration should be given to supporting serious, internationally connected research. The EU is already doing this.

Support for multilingual education needs to be informed by the specific local conditions in Macedonia. This is especially important in approaches to teaching Macedonian to Albanians and vice versa, but the relevance extends also to the other languages. Thus, while international teaching methodologies stress a contrastive approach that focuses on differences, what is needed in Macedonia is a comparative approach that focuses on similarities first. There are both language ideological and pragmatic reasons for this approach. Macedonian and Albanian students are too often told how different their languages are, rather than beginning from the many shared features. This in turn discourages more efficient acquisition of the second language. By taking a comparative rather than a contrastive approach, instructors can encourage students of Macedonian or Albanian who have the other language as their first language to learn more effectively while at the same time gaining a better grasp of their commonalities. U.S. Policy should encourage educational efforts that are adapted to local conditions rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching methodologies. Since international actors are involved in these matters, an informed policy is in U.S. interests.

### **Co-Curricular Activity**

I lectured at the Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences' Research Center for Areal Linguistics on current trends in Balkan linguistics, and I met with U.S. embassy personnel (Gazmend Iljazi, Assistant Public Affairs Officer) to discuss my work and the situation in Macedonia. I also attended the 40th anniversary celebration of the Academy of Sciences of Albania, of which I am an honorary member, and I met with colleagues at the relatively new Center for Albanology, which has taken over some of the functions that used to be housed in the Academy. I also gave opening remarks at a conference celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Orthography Congress that produced the current Albanian standard. (I was the only non-Albanian at that conference.) In this way, I kept up with both standardizing ideals and reality on the ground. I also attended a meeting of the Scientific Committee of the European Academic Network on Romani Studies (Council of Europe). I met with Ambassador Jon Ilievski, who now works at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Macedonia. I have been invited to address the Ministry on my next trip to Macedonia. I also met with Sheldon Yett, head of UNICEF in Macedonia and with Prof. Dieter Halwachs, who is directing an EU twinning project in Macedonia entitled "Supporting Integration of Ethnic Communities in the Educational System." In connection with the latter, I also met with the members of his team, who represent a number of Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish and Romani NGOs in Macedonia. I met with literally dozens of scholars from the Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences (MANU), Sts. Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje, Southeast European University, the University of Tetovo, the Goce Delchev University of Shtip, and the Academy of Sciences of Kosova. Of these, the most significant discussions were with Prof. Ljupcho Kocarev, vice-president of MANU, who is a computer scientist. We have begun planning for a multilingual corpus of the dialects of Macedonia that will serve as the basis for both a new kind of dialect atlas and a new kind of computer modeling of multilingual language contact as a complex adaptive system. This unexpected result of my research will be of tremendous benefit to Macedonia as well as important for the wider academic world.

## **Conclusions**

It has often been argued during the past two or three decades that the Balkan *Sprachbund* (linguistic league) is now merely an historical artifact rather than a on-going phenomenon. My research has demonstrated that Balkan linguistic practices and changes have continued into the

present in Macedonia. An important result of this project was the demonstration that Balkan linguistic processes in Macedonia did not cease with the end of the Ottoman Empire. In this, Macedonia has retained a level of multilingualism that, while existing at the local level in parts of every Balkan nation state, is nowhere as widespread nor as characteristically urban as in Macedonia.

### **Plans for Future Research Agenda/ Presentations and Publications**

I am scheduled to give papers utilizing results from my research at conferences of the Australian-Macedonian Human Rights Council, the International Pragmatics Association, the European Linguistics Society, the Biennial Balkan and South Slavic Conference, and the 9th Macedonian-North American Conference on Macedonian Studies, among other regular professional meetings, in the course of the next year or so. I will also be giving talks at various universities. In terms of publications, I will have articles coming out in various journals in the U.S. and Europe (*Contrastive Linguistics* [Sofia], *Juzhnoslovesnki filolog* [Belgrade], *Linguistic Compass* [USA], etc.) as well as in several Festschrift volumes that will benefit from (and duly acknowledge) the research reported on here. The ultimate goal, as stated above, will be a monograph on Macedonia as a Balkan linguistic macrocosm. Future directions of research, as noted above, include a project with Ljupcho Kocarev, vice-president of MANU, toward a multilingual dialect corpus and atlas of Macedonia and a modeling of same as a complex adaptive system.

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